Starting salaries of college graduates

One of the values that students place on the field of study they choose for their bachelor's degree is the earning potential associated with occupations in that field. Starting salaries offered by employers are related not only to the value of the skills learned by college graduates but also to the supply of qualified individuals. Thus, differences in starting salaries shed light on the changing demands of the labor market and the response of students and the education system to those changes.

- Between 1977 and 1993, college graduates who majored in computer sciences and engineering had much higher starting salaries than did graduates in all other fields of study; while the salary benefit of majoring in such fields was high, it declined between 1980 and 1993.
- Starting salaries among graduates who majored in the humanities or education have fluctuated over time, but in general, they were considerably lower than the starting salaries for all graduates. Salaries in both fields, however, rose relative to those of all graduates between 1984 and 1993.
- Among 1993 graduates, females were much more likely than males to major in education, and males were more likely than females to major in computer sciences and engineering: The most common field of study for both males and females was business, with the starting salary benefits for those who majored in this field increasing between 1986 and 1993.
- Median starting salaries for 1993 male graduates were substantially higher than those for female graduates, both overall and within certain fields of study including business, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences.

Percentage difference between median starting salaries for all college graduates and college graduates in major fields of study: Selected years of graduation 1977–93

	Year of graduation					
Major field of study	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
	Percent above or (below) median for all college graduates					
Humanities	(20.3)	(15.4)	(18.6)	(17.1)	(13.6)	(11.1)
Social and behavioral sciences	(10.6)	(11.4)	(12.6)	(8.8)	(9.4)	(9.0)
Natural sciences	(1.8)	(0.8)	(5.0)	(6.2)	(1.8)	(7.5)
Computer sciences and engineering	46.4	61.0	44.8	34.3	41.0	35.8
Education	(14.1)	(18.6)	(20.1)	(18.6)	(11.7)	(15.3)
Business and management	14.4	13.2	4.8	2.6	4.6	10.4
Other professional or technical	2.8	6.8	(1.3)	(2.9)	2.2	3.3

Annual median starting salaries (in 1996 constant dollars) of 1993 college graduates, by sex and major field of study, and the percentage difference between male and female starting salaries

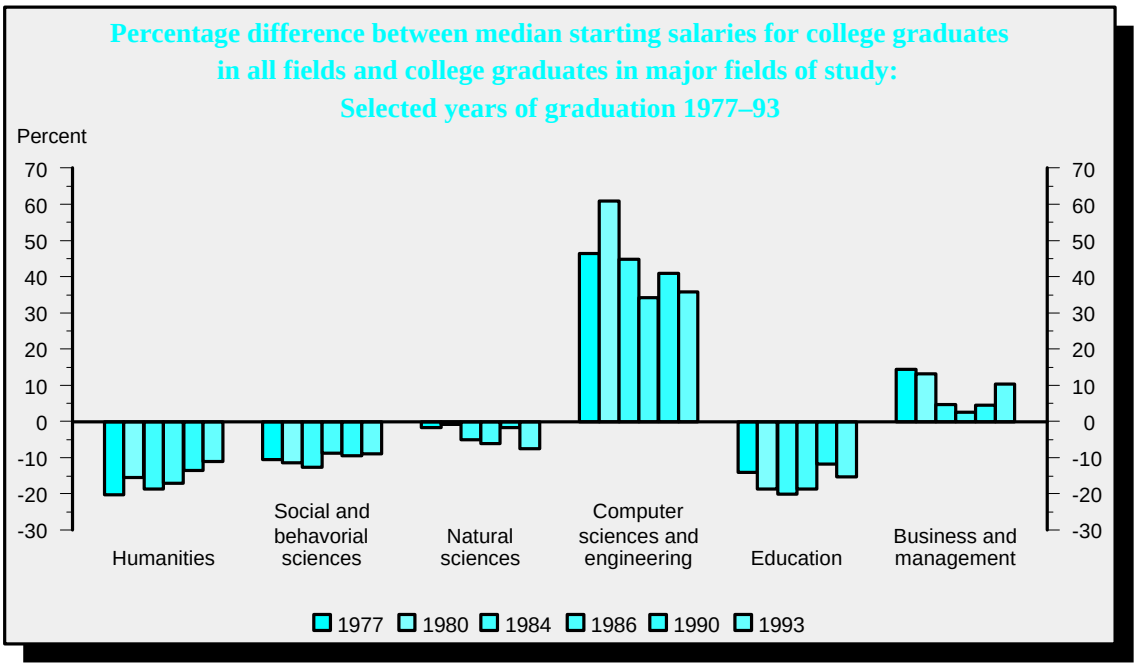
		Male		Female		
Major field of study	All graduates	Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Female/male percentage difference
Total	**$23,600**	**100**	**$26,122**	**100**	**$21,990**	***(15.8)**
Humanities	20,974	9	21,793	12	20,614	(5.4)
Social and behavioral sciences	21,478	13	23,335	15	20,576	*(11.8)
Natural sciences	21,832	7	24,226	6	20,508	*(15.3)
Computer sciences and engineering	32,045	16	32,385	3	30,155	(6.9)
Education	19,985	6	21,236	17	19,651	(7.5)
Business and management	26,044	32	27,728	23	23,802	*(14.2)
Other professional or technical	24,384	17	24,363	23	24,399	0.1

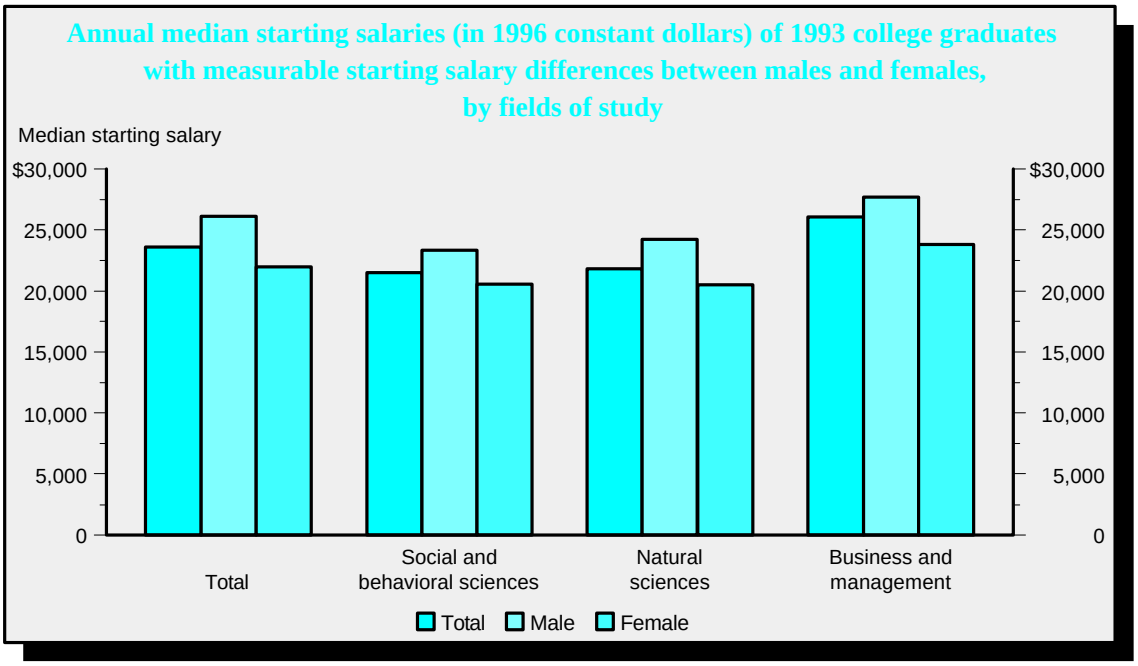
* Male salaries were greater than female salaries ($p < 0.05$).

NOTE: Data presented are for bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation. Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Starting salaries of college graduates





NOTE: Data presented are for bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Percentage difference between median starting salaries for all college graduates and college graduates in major fields of study: Selected years of graduation 1977–93

Major field of study	Year of graduation					
	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
	Percent above or (below) median for all college graduates					
Humanities	(20.3)	(15.4)	(18.6)	(17.1)	(13.6)	(11.1)
Social and behavioral sciences	(10.6)	(11.4)	(12.6)	(8.8)	(9.4)	(9.0)
Natural sciences	(1.8)	(0.8)	(5.0)	(6.2)	(1.8)	(7.5)
Computer sciences and engineering	46.4	61.0	44.8	34.3	41.0	35.8
Education	(14.1)	(18.6)	(20.1)	(18.6)	(11.7)	(15.3)
Business and management	14.4	13.2	4.8	2.6	4.6	10.4
Other professional or technical	2.8	6.8	(1.3)	(2.9)	2.2	3.3

NOTE: Data presented pertain to bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduate Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Annual median starting salaries (in 1996 constant dollars) of 1993 college graduates, by sex and major field of study, and the percentage difference between male and female starting salaries

Major field of study	All graduates	Male		Female		
		Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Female/male percentage difference
Total	**$23,600**	**100**	**$26,122**	**100**	**$21,990**	***(15.8)**
Humanities	20,974	9	21,793	12	20,614	(5.4)
Social and behavioral sciences	21,478	13	23,335	15	20,576	*(11.8)
Natural sciences	21,832	7	24,226	6	20,508	*(15.3)
Computer sciences and engineering	32,045	16	32,385	3	30,155	(6.9)
Education	19,985	6	21,236	17	19,651	(7.5)
Business and management	26,044	32	27,728	23	23,802	*(14.2)
Other professional or technical	24,384	17	24,363	23	24,399	0.1

* Male salaries were greater than female salaries ($p < 0.05$).

NOTE: Data presented pertain to bachelor's degree recipients who were working full time and who were not enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduation. Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduate Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table 34-1 Median starting salaries (in 1996 constant dollars) of college graduates who worked full time and who were not enrolled in college 1 year after graduation, by field of study, sex, and race/ethnicity: Selected years of graduation 1977–93

Major field of study, sex, and race/ethnicity	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
All graduates	**$25,880**	**$23,283**	**$25,367**	**$27,017**	**$25,453**	**$23,600**
Major field of study						
Humanities and social and behavioral sciences	22,527	20,179	21,508	23,518	22,671	21,265
Humanities	20,625	19,687	20,657	22,398	21,942	20,974
Social and behavioral sciences	23,129	20,630	22,170	24,646	23,057	21,478
Natural and computer sciences and engineering	32,219	32,734	34,076	33,702	33,442	27,805
Natural sciences	25,405	23,097	24,099	25,338	24,992	21,832
Computer sciences and engineering	37,900	37,480	36,719	36,275	35,883	32,045
Technical/professional	25,897	23,177	24,765	26,240	25,278	23,898
Education	22,220	18,958	20,257	21,985	22,487	19,985
Business	29,605	26,352	26,575	27,714	26,683	26,044
Other professional or technical	26,601	24,865	25,038	26,220	26,015	24,384
Sex						
Male	29,216	26,696	28,048	29,297	27,714	26,122
Female	22,503	20,597	23,095	24,874	23,978	21,989
Race/ethnicity						
White	25,959	23,422	25,437	26,996	25,366	23,611
Black	23,925	21,811	22,629	24,442	24,335	21,919
Hispanic	26,754	25,495	26,325	27,218	25,981	23,509
Asian/Pacific Islander	28,996	22,097	26,842	30,182	29,122	24,795
American Indian/Alaskan Native	—	—	—	27,369	24,751	22,797

— Too few sample observations for a reliable estimate.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table 34-2 Percentage distribution of college graduates who were working full time and who were not enrolled in college 1 year after graduation, by field of study, sex, and race/ethnicity: Selected years of graduation 1977–93

Major field of study, sex, and race/ethnicity	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
All graduates	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Major field of study						
Humanities	8.2	9.1	9.0	7.4	9.2	10.9
Social and behavioral sciences	14.7	11.9	11.7	10.3	14.0	14.1
Natural sciences	7.5	7.1	5.6	5.3	4.8	6.7
Computer sciences and engineering	9.1	9.6	15.8	17.3	12.2	9.0
Education	17.9	14.3	9.6	8.9	9.7	11.6
Business	24.0	25.3	28.5	31.8	28.5	27.4
Other professional or technical	18.5	22.6	19.7	19.0	21.6	20.3
Sex						
Male	57.1	51.2	50.5	49.6	48.2	46.4
Female	42.9	48.8	49.5	50.4	51.8	53.4
Race/ethnicity						
White	90.2	92.1	90.0	88.9	86.6	85.0
Black	6.1	5.2	4.9	3.9	6.1	5.5
Hispanic	1.5	1.4	2.3	3.3	3.5	4.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.6	1.0	2.4	2.0	3.3	4.4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.5	0.6
Other	0.4	—	—	1.1	(*)	(*)

— Too few sample observations for a reliable estimate.

* Not applicable.

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table S34(a) Standard errors for the first text table in *Indicator 34*

Major field of study	Year of graduation					
	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
Humanities	3.4	1.9	2.4	1.5	2.4	2.2
Social and behavioral sciences	1.8	1.8	2.3	1.8	1.6	1.6
Natural sciences	3.1	4.1	3.1	2.2	3.1	2.3
Computer sciences and engineering	2.9	2.9	1.9	1.5	1.8	2.9
Education	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.2	1.6	1.6
Business and management	1.6	1.8	1.4	0.8	1.6	2.2
Other professional or technical	2.8	2.2	1.7	1.2	2.1	2.4

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table S34(b) Standard errors for the second text table in *Indicator 34*

Major field of study	All graduates	Male		Female	
		Percentage in field	Median starting salary	Percentage in field	Median starting salary
Total	**$244**	**—**	**$381**	**—**	**$227**
Humanities	488	0.8	686	0.8	510
Social and behavioral sciences	342	0.8	681	0.8	434
Natural sciences	505	0.6	919	0.6	704
Computer sciences and engineering	622	1.2	646	0.4	1,602
Education	353	0.6	708	1.8	388
Business and management	526	1.6	656	1.2	568
Other professional or technical	567	1.2	985	1.1	746

— Not applicable.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).

Table S34-1 Standard errors for table 34-1

Major field of study, sex, and race/ethnicity	1977	1980	1984	1986	1990	1993
All graduates	**$316**	**$267**	**$224**	**$149**	**$171**	**$244**
Major field of study						
Humanities and social and behavioral sciences	416	297	390	294	331	290
Humanities	864	408	608	388	602	488
Social and behavioral sciences	425	369	568	485	394	342
Natural and computer sciences and engineering	926	915	577	444	595	570
Natural sciences	771	937	775	590	790	505
Computer sciences and engineering	617	555	420	400	416	621
Technical/professional	384	293	254	165	205	278
Education	254	217	429	302	400	354
Business	304	391	330	219	410	526
Other professional or technical	716	491	416	321	538	567
Sex						
Male	210	389	336	198	370	381
Female	246	204	283	194	229	228
Race/ethnicity						
White	335	283	238	161	182	269
Black	1,150	754	1,114	797	765	836
Hispanic	1,699	3,323	1,325	689	912	715
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,919	2,283	1,429	904	1,061	1,021
American Indian/Alaskan Native	—	—	—	2,003	1,798	2,056

— Not available.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Recent College Graduates Surveys (1977–90) and 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (B&B:93/94).